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ABSTRACT

Media, specifically documentary films on television, profoundly affect both social structure and man's psychological percepts. The clash of views depicted is between "print man" (using U.S. Representative Harley Staggers as an example) and "electronic man" (portrayed as Frank Stanton of CBS) centering on Stagger's objections to the CBS television documentary, "The Selling of the Pentagon." Evidence from Carpenter, Ong, Travers, Krugman, Hoban, and especially McLuhan, is used to support the argument that the nature of film (and TV) does not lend itself to the same evaluation applicable to print. Thus, a misunderstanding of the workings of the "grammar of filmic communication" leads to misapplied printlike societal expectations and goals. (CH)

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A TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINIST VIEWPOINT OF THE STANTON-STAGGERS CONFLICT OVER THE SELLING OF THE PENTAGON: PRINT MAN VERSUS ELECTRONIC MAN*

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> We see how one thing driveth or enforceth another, like as in a clock where there are many wheels, the first wheel being stirred driveth the next and that the third and so forth, till the last moveth the instrument that striketh the clock.
>
> G. Malynes, Lex Mercatoria, 1622[1]

The recent confrontation of CBS president Frank Stanton and representative Harley Staggers of the House Commerce Committee concerning the truthfulness of The Selling of the Pentagon provides much interest to a student of rhetoric. However, it is the thesis of this paper that this conflict of interpretation by these two eminent gentlemen can be attributed to more than a conflict of opinion, of interest or even a question of the place of mass media in modern society. This is a funda-

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mental question of the way media communicate, a question of the grammer of print and the natural grammar of the film. It is a conflict of perceptions provided by the media. Essentially it is a conflict between print man and electronic man. Staggers represented typography with its peculiar assumptions and perceptions, Stanton represented the electronic media.

Disclaimer

This is not to suggest that the individual protagonists involved can be classified as "print man" or "oral or electronic man." In fact, when we study the life and times of Frank Stanton he emerges as almost an archetypical print man. He has the appropriate academic training, is cool of manner, and analytic in tone.[2] On the other hand, Harley Staggers from his television appearances seems to exemplify the "oral" man. His political style, his enthusiasms and his choice of occupation do not mark him as the detached, analytic or tightly controlled person which McLuhan describes as characterizing the print man.[3] However, Frank Stanton did not shoot, write nor edit the film. In fact, his role did not demand that he even see it before it was released. Rather his was the role of the titular head of an organization which uses the electronic media, and regardless of his personal preferences or training or mode of operation he was cast as a protagonist for the newer media. Staggers emerged as a man angry with the film medium because it did not comply with the conventional standards of probity devised for print.[4] His personal medium was oral communication and that was not particularly linear,

sequential nor detached.

Technological Determinism

A brief outline of the theoretical underpinnings of the position adopted in this paper is now in order. The technological determinist position simply stated is that media affect the course of history.[5] This is one dimension of the celebrated aphorism: "The medium is the message" attributed to Marshall McLuhan. Just as Karl Marx is an economic determinist with his insistence on the primacy of economics as the determining factor in the course of human events, so McLuhan posits the primacy of media. The media affect society in general by acting on social organization and structure, and secondly act on the individual by affecting personal psychological perceptions and ways of thinking.

McLuhan is the acknowledged prophet of Technological Determinism. Perhaps "oracle" is the better term as ambiguity seems to be part of the message (or the medium, or both). In fact, McLuhan is a synthesizer who can be best understood by analysing the ideas of those who contributed to his philosophy. Among many, for the purposes of this discourse, the names of Lynn White, Harold Innis, Walter Ong, and Edmund Carpenter stand out. Lynn White pointed out the effects of innovative technology on society; Innis documented the sociological and psychological effects of the technology of communication; Edmund Carpenter saw media as languages (for want of a better word) which structure the message communicated. This idea of media as language provided a logical link for the relationship noted by Innis between the effects of media on society in

general and the way media shape individuals' perspectives and ways of thinking. Taking each contribution one at a time (in a straightforward linear sequential fashion) might allow for clear exposition.

Lynn White with Medieval Technology and Social Change outlined the course of history as a result of the introduction of various forms of technology.[6] For example, the item McLuhan adopts is the introduction of the stirrup from the Orient which established the mounted armoured warrior as the ultimate weapon of medieval times. (Before the stirrup the cavalryman could not be firmly fixed to his horse and consequently he indulged in a different style of fighting which was not nearly as effective.) From this unit of warfare developed a social structure. The mounted warrior needed support systems. A squire, peasants to grow food for the knight and his horse, and an armourer became just the basic requirements. Soon bands of knights were reporting to a super knight who became lord of the manor who in turn owed allegiance to a king. Enter the feudal system courtesy of the stirrup. Technology affected history, and affected society.

Harold Adams Innis with The Bias of Communication developed the theory that the displacement of one medium of communication by another causes effects of a social nature in society in general, and also of a psychological nature of the individual using the medium.[7] "Media" of communication for Innis was extensive ranging from papyrus to electronic communication. A quotation from Walter Ong made twenty years after Innis' death will give an example of this two fold effect---of the gross societal change affected by the medium, and the interior psychological

effect on each individual in the society:

> For the most part, however, historians have assessed the effect of printing in quite external fashion: printing "spread ideas," made the text of the Bible "available," put the Bible "into the hands of the people to read." All this is true enough. But the interior change in psychological structures tied in with the shift of the word from a written to a printed culture is at least as important as the physical spread of inscribed texts, for change in sociological structures are the interior coefficients of developments in exterior history.[8]

With this outlook, the importance of the typographic or Gutenberg revolution is the appearance of intense individualism. Reading fosters divisiveness to the extent that it isolates the individual from communal structures. Reading is silent. Reading deprives the senses other than sight to prevent distraction. When reading was oral recitation as in medieval times, Ong claims, this isolation effect was minimized. However, silent reading, which increased with print, "forced the individual into himself and out of the tribe."[9] Similarly, another revolution in psychological conditioning occurred when print was displaced by radio and television.[10]

Another root of this idea can be found in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that the language the speaker uses has a determining influence on the character of his thought.[11, 12] The structure of sentences, the relative importance of tenses, the ability to show causal relationships are examples. Ancient Hebrew tenses are not rigid as Indo European tenses are. Past, present and future are not differentiated. However, ancient Hebrew shows causal relationships more effectively.[13] Thus the users of these two different languages would put different emphasis on the

importance of time and cause and effect.

Whether or not it is the actual language used that makes the difference, certainly there is a manifest difference between cultures and the way men in different cultures think, and the emphases they put on the various senses.[14] Again to quote from Walter Ong:

> Cultures vary greatly in their exploitation of the various senses and in the way in which they relate their conceptual apparatus to the various senses. It has been a commonplace that the ancient Hebrews and the ancient Greeks differed in the values they set on the auditory. The Hebrews tended to think of understanding as a kind of hearing, whereas the Greeks thought of it more as a kind of seeing, although far less exclusively as seeing than post Cartesian Western man generally has tended to do.[15]

Given this basic idea that the structure of perception is strongly related to culture and to the form of language, McLuhan added Edmund Carpenter's idea of the media as languages. (Carpenter, an anthropologist, investigated the cultural aspects of language.) The next step in the argument, is that the medium which is used structures the perception of the user. In his much quoted essay, The New Languages, Carpenter cites the results of several experiments which compared and contrasted the media of print, radio, television and live lecture.[16] The interpretation of the results demanded that the experimenters realize that the message (or the content of the message), had a structure which would tend to favor one or the other of the media. One could not write a script which would do equally well printed, delivered as a lecture, or reorganized for radio or television transmission. More rigorous media researchers than Carpenter now accept this as a datum.[17] Carpenter's

conclusion was that there were differences which could not be explained as differences of degree, rather the messages when transmitted over the different media were different in kind. The medium affected the message.

Experimental Evidence

Although one might reasonably ask if this is not venturing too far from the Stanton-Staggers controversy, it is important to stand off a little longer and consider some recent experimental evidence. In collecting the results of research on perception Robert Travers makes a point which reinforces the ideas of Carpenter and Ong. His comment is not at all surprising, in fact it is rather obvious:

> One cannot reasonably ask the general question whether the eye or the ear is more efficient for the transmission of information, since clearly some information is better transmitted by one sensory channel than by another. If a person needed to know about the appearance or physical characteristics of an unfamiliar animal, he would do much better to examine the animal visually than to hear a description by another observer.[18]

Travers' next contribution is perhaps more revealing. He cited evidence that the information processing powers of our various modalities are not what was formerly accepted. For example, there had been considerable folklore about using two modalities instead of one to convey information. Claiming experience gained by teaching millions of soldiers with audiovisual methods during World War II, the accepted audiovisual doctrine was that having sight and sound was more effective than having sound alone.[19] Travers outlines research which would support the hypothesis

that under certain conditions combined auditory and visual stimuli may even inhibit rather than increase understanding because of the perceptual limitations of the human nervous system.[20] Thus the manner in which information is presented to the human nervous system is critical, and this manner is a function of the medium of presentation.

More specific evidence concerning differences in the attack on the human sensorium by different media are reported by Krugman. Using the Mackworth Optiscan (an eye camera) and analysis of brain wave (EEG) data of the responses to print as compared to television Krugman concluded:

> Our initial EEG data supports McLuhan in the sense that television does not appear to be communication as we know it. Our subject was working to learn something from a print ad, but was passive about television. If something happened to communicate, that's fine; if it didn't, it went by and was gone and no process of scanning or dual attention would worry about its shortcomings. The subject was no more trying to learn something from television than he would be trying to learn something from a park landscape while resting on a park bench.[21]

Thus Krugman found that there are different neural mechanisms at work when reading and watching television. This is not a surprising finding but one which is often neglected by analysts who would emphasize the content of the message as having the dominant effect on the individual receiving the message.

Other Evidence

Other evidence supporting the differences between the human acceptance of different media can be gleaned from the opinions of artists,

administrators, and men of affairs. The artist and media critic Rudolph Arnheim once observed that no really complex series of ideas could be conveyed by visual means alone.[22] Walter Ong quotes Eugen Rosenstock Huessey: "Experiences of the first order, or the first rank, are not realized through the eye."[23] Stuart Hood, when director of Television Programs for the BBC, supported this idea. When discussing whether some topics involving logical argument at an intellectual plane can be given the simplifying process necessary to mass communication, he said:

> Television is in some ways an imperfect medium for communication. This is partly because the viewer's visual memory can play strange tricks. From a sequence of newsfilm, or from a documentary, it may retain some striking but irrelevant detail---a child's face in a crowd, a gesture, some distracting element....Again, information in itself is useless if it conveys nothing more than a number of discrete facts, disjecta membra, incoherent and unrelated.[24]

Central Issue

Which leads us to the central issue of this argument after a rather circuitous introduction. If informational programming on television is to give us something other than "a jumble of discrete facts," it must be edited and compiled. The confrontation between Messers Staggers and Stanton revolved on the appropriateness of certain techniques of compilation. The heart of the matter is the "quoting out of context" charge. The concept of "context" is essentially a literary one, and has no referent in filmic grammar. It is precisely because one can "look up" a quote in a book or text that this device becomes useful. In oral discourse, or filmic time, there is no parallel to

"context." If context is essential, there is no legitimacy to the cross-cut interview. Any program edited in this fashion cannot be scrutinized with the precision that can be devoted to a legal document. Mr. Staggers was applying standards which were hopelessly inappropriate to the medium. It is as if he were criticising Dixieland jazz for not sounding like Hayden.

Stanton versus Staggers

In the light of what has been discussed, not only would a rhetorical analysis of the arguments of the Stanton-Staggers controversy be irrelevant, but also the actual participants in the confrontation were of no importance to the issue. In fact, they were as interchangeable in their roles as the proverbial "guy in the white hat," with his black-hatted counterpart. In fact, the whole program has the sense of deja vu about it. It was a rerun. In the middle fifties the esteemed media critic Gilbert Seldes castigated the techniques employed by Edward R. Murrow (CBS again) in his attack via television documentary on the actions of Senator Joseph McCarthy.[25] The argument centered on what constituted valid film technique for a documentary film. The "cross cut" interview could juxtapose conflicting arguments in such a way as to bring forth in the minds of the audience ideas completely different from those intended by the speakers.

Similarly, the Washington Post TV critic Laurence Laurent indicates he will never again be interviewed for television as the final product of one of his interviews did not mean what he wanted it to mean.[26] It

is a surprising attitude for a man who should know better. In a medium such as this the film editor in the last analysis "tells" (or perhaps "shows," although neither word is appropriate) the audience something about what the subject (for example, Laurence Laurent) has said. The medium is not a passive transmission belt for the ideas of the person in front of the camera. The editor has the last "say."

This is certainly taking unfair advantage of the viewer if he expects the film to portray actuality. However, if the viewer sees the medium in a way analagous to "someone telling him something about something else," it is simply a fact of life and no cause for moral outrage.[27]

In the cases quoted above the essentially cinematic means of communication called "montage" have been utilized. The briefest explanation of this mechanism is probably the classic one in which Sergei Eisenstein compared the juxtaposition of shots in a film to a Japanese ideogram.[28] The ideogrammatic symbol for "eye" when joined with the ideogrammatic symbol for "water" gives the ideogram which means "to weep." Eye plus water means tears, which at another level of abstraction means sorrow. Two symbols which are different in nature when placed side by side bring forth in the mind of the audience a new idea or a new emotion.

This is very different from the mechanism by which print communicates. The abstract written symbols for sounds (the twenty-six letters of the alphabet) are arranged in combinations in words which in turn signify ideas. This operation stresses sequence and abstraction whereas

filmic communication is experiential and direct. Today the American public has been conditioned to accept the montage method of communication by the ubiquitous television commercial. For the last ten or more years the television commercial has been depending on the juxtaposition of beautiful scenes, beautiful girls, playful dogs and adorable babies and the products to be sold. There is no logical connection in the literal "print" sense of the word "logical." The literate mind prefers sequence to association and film is an associative medium.

Staggers as Representative of Typographic Man

If one can accept the idea of Representative Staggers as representing print technology against electronic technology then the quote from Ong has a special meaning:

> When it does not imagine oral-aural memory as verbatim in the way literate memory can be, a highly literate culture tends to regard the state or oral-aural memory as more disadvantageous than it actually is. This is because literate culture tends to overrate verbatim repetition or record. In literate cultures the illusion is widespread that if one has the exact words someone has uttered, one has by that very fact his exact meaning. This is not true. (Emphasis added)[29]

A documentary film is simply a misnomer. Attempts to define the word with scholarly precision have failed.[30] Mr. Springer (of the Staggers' subcommittee) sought to find the definition in Webster's dictionary.[31] That is the typical recourse of the print man. The lexicographer's viewpoint was in the same as his own---out of date. It had been formulated before the "documentary" film in its current form was invented. The necessity for classification and standardization is

much more real in print than in oral or filmic communication where many other clues are available to the receiver of the message. It is also pertinent that in his mode of operation the print man ignores the fact that the lexicographer classifies words from a living language, and the dictionary is merely a depository for the old terms, not a source of knowledge.

Throughout the proceedings it was also evident that the majority of the members of the Staggers subcommittee paid much more attention to the transcript of the film than to the film itself.[32] One is reminded of judges at a baking contest who spent their time judging the written recipes and ignored the cakes. Is this a bias towards the primacy of print?

Krugman (who was responsible for the brain wave data mentioned previously) suggests that print man may gain his definiteness of approach and dogmatism from his relative ignorance. Krugman goes on to speculate that the younger generation who have their primary formative years with the television experience are more familiar with the phenomena of their environment. They do not, however, have a structured response to events as they occur. They are then more spontaneous than the print generation. The print man, however, has stored relatively less information, so there is much that he does not recognize and to which he reacts not at all. So print man seems very selective, and reacts well, or not at all. He concludes: "McLuhan was aware of some such difference while none of our mass communication theory was relevant."[33]

Conclusion

If the standards of truth on television are to be as rigorous as Mr. Staggers would like, then the filmic statements we call "documentary" films would have to go. He is oblivious to the grammar of the medium and is trying to fault it on textual accuracy when there is no text. It is about as "accurate" as the mosaic approach of the cross cut interview allows it to be. Mr. Staggers would limit film or television to its recording function and would not permit it to assume its own dynamic. Film collapses time, space and juxtaposes views according to its own peculiar grammar. It functions under constraints of logistics and technique and especially of time. The simple remedy is an enlightened populace who views all TV fare with scepticism and notes its limitations. One does not have to be highly sophisticated to realize the difference between a live and an edited interview.

In summary, the Stanton-Staggers confrontation is more than a trial of freedom of the press, or a clash of vested interest. It is an outstanding example of the personal and corporate perceptions of the role of the "new media." The technological determinist claims that media not only affect the social structure of society, but also the individual's psychological percepts. Media affect society and shape the way we think. Representative Staggers has the typical stance of "typographic man," who would apply standards appropriate for the assessment of legal documents to edited filmed reports. In this he betrays a complete misunderstanding of the nature and the grammar of filmic communication. Mr. Stanton, however, while personally by training and

predeliction a "print" person, represented a corporate thrust which was based on the usage of filmic communication. The result was a drama which is a microcosm of an affliction of our present society.

The lesson is obvious. The antidote is the correct understanding of media and their effects. Because, as McLuhan reminds us, it is only on the unwary that the media can impose their assumptions.[34]

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[2]He has expressed scepticism on the importance of McLuhan's theories. Personal communication, IRTS conference, April, 1968.

[3]Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965) p. 86.

[4]U.S. Congress, Proceedings Against Frank Stanton and Columbia Broadcasting System, 92nd Congress, House Report No. 92-349. House Calendar 125. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), pp. 126-128.

[5]A glance at a standard textbook on mass communications circa 1965 reveals no hint of the existence of technological determinism. For example, Petersen, Jensen and Rivers, The Mass Media and Modern Society (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965) or Emery, Ault and Agee, Introduction to Mass Communications (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., Inc., 1966) have no reference in their texts to Innis or McLuhan. The 1971 edition of The Mass Media and Modern Society has eight pages on the theories of McLuhan and his predecessors.

[6]Lynn White, Medieval Technology and Social Change (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

[7]Harold Adams Innis, The Bias of Communication (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951) cited by James W. Carey, "Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan," McLuhan Pro and Con, ed. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Penguin Books, 1969) p. 281.

[8]Walter J. Ong, The Presence of the Word (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971) p. 264.

[9]Ibid., p. 272.

[10]This revolution, according to McLuhan, "brings us at the opening of the electronic age to the sealing of the entire human family into a single global tribe," Marshall McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962) p. 8.

[11]James W. Carey, "Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan," McLuhan Pro and Con, ed. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Penguin Books, 1969) p. 282.

[12]The transformational grammar of Chomsky can be used to explain some of the commonalities that the initial language efforts of infants from different cultures appear to have. When the infants acquire their native languages (e.g. English or Russian), the commonalities disappear.

Perhaps their perceptions are shaped by the grammar of their learned language. See Edmund B. Bolles, "The Innate Grammar of Baby Talk," Saturday Review, March 18, 1972, p. 53. However, neither this nor Whorf-Sapir is critical to the argument.

[13]Elbert L. Sapinsley, Northern Illinois University, personal communication.

[14]For an expansion of the idea that "culture communicates," see: Edward T. Hall, The Silent Language (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1959).

[15]Ong, op. cit. p. 2.

[16]Edmund Carpenter, "The New Languages," Explorations in Communications, eds. Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960) p. 162.

[17]H. J. Hsia, "The Information Processing Capacity of Modality and Channel Performance," AV Communication Review, XIX No. 1 (Spring, 1971) p. 51.

[18]Robert M. W. Travers, Man's Information Systems (Scranton, Pennsylvania: Chandler, 1970) p. 84.

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[20]Travers, op. cit., p. 106.

[21]Herbert D. Krugman, "Brain Wave Measures of Media Involvement," Journal of Advertising Research, XXI, No. 1 (February, 1971) pp. 3-9.

[22]A. William Bluem, Documentary in American Television (New York: Hastings House, 1965) p. 171.

[23]Ong, op. cit., p. 1.

[24]Bluem, op. cit., p. 171.

[25]Ibid., pp. 98-99.

[26]U. S. Congress, Subpoenaed Material Re Certain TV News Documentary Programs, 92nd Congress, Hearings before the Special Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, Serial No. 92-16 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971) p. 142.

[27]Note Representative Staggers' reaction, U.S. Congress, Proceedings Against Frank Stanton..., p. 128.

[28]Sergei Eisenstein, Film Form, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1949) p. 30.

[29]Ong, op. cit., p. 32.

[30]Bluem, op. cit., pp. 13-16 and 122-133.

[31]U.S. Congress, Subpoenaed Material . . . See pp. 104-139.

[32]Ibid., pp. 37-48.

[33]Krugman, op. cit., p. 9.

[34]Charles F. Hoban, The State of the Art of Instructional Films (Stanford: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Media, 1971) p. 13.